Fishermen in jails of Pakistan

3293. SHRI KANJIBHAI PATEL:
SHRI VIJAYKUMAR RUPANI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a delegation of MPs from Gujarat called on Prime Minister in March, 2006, in connection with the release of Fishermen of Gujarat languishing in the jails of Pakistan;

(b) whether they have proposed to enter into an agreement with Government of Pakjstan on the lines of agreement done in the past with the Sri Lankan Government, to solve the similar problem; and

(c) if so, the progress made in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes.

(b) and (c) While no agreement on the release of fishermen has been signed with Sri Lanka, India and Sri Lanka both work jointly for the expeditious release of fishermen who may stray into the other country's waters.

Pakistan is today detaining 436 Indian fishermen. It is Government's expectation that Pakistan will implement the recommendations by the India-Pak Judicial Committee to release forthwith those fishermen whose nationality status has been confirmed.

Problems of fishermen

3294. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether fishermen from Rameswaram are constrained to cross the border for fishing around Katcha Theevu;

(b) whether it has been a practice for decades and Sri Lankan Government did not treat it seriously then;

(c) whether the problem of fishermen have not been dealt with on the same analogy to revise certain clauses concerning the right of fishing in and around Katcha Theevu, which originally belongs to India, when several clauses of Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement annulled or modified by mutual discussions;

(d) whether it was a blunder to give up such rights during the Agreement; and

(e) whether the earlier Agreement would be revised?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (e) As per the Agreements concluded with Sri Lanka in 1974 and 1976, the Katcha Theevu Island lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). Both these agreements were subsequently laid before Parliament. Under the Agreements, Indian fishermen are allowed access to Katcha Theevu Island for rest, for drying of nets and for the annual St. Anthony's festival. The right of access is not understood to cover fishing rights around the Island to Indian fishermen. Consequently, it is important for our fishermen to respect the IMBL. At the same time, we have impressed on the Sri Lankan authorities, time and again, to act with restraint and treat our fishermen in a humane manner.